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ABSTRACT

This study surveyed chief executive officers (CEOs) in higher education about ethical issues pertaining to multiculturalism in academe. Using the Delphi technique of a three-round survey to ascertain consensus on issues, it polled CEOs at all 779 colleges and universities that are members of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Participants were asked to: (1) identify five to eight ethical issues pertaining to multiculturalism in higher education; (2) prioritize 31 issues identified in the first round; and (3) reevaluate their ranking of each issue based on the median rankings assigned by the participants as a whole. A total of 22 questionnaires were returned in the third round. The results indicated an overall lack of consensus among CEOs with regard to ethical issues pertaining to multiculturalism in higher education. Issues that received some broad support included those related to minorities assuming responsibility for their own success, ethnic or racial quotas, division within the student body based on racial or ethnic differences, and "reverse discrimination." Written comments from various presidents showed attitudes toward multiculturalism ranging from enthusiastic support to hostility. (Contains 24 references.) (MDM)

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TITLE: Chief Executive Officers in Higher Education Forecast Ethical Issues Pertaining to Multiculturalism

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ABSTRACT:

The dramatic increases projected for minority populations in the United States continue to generate widespread speculation regarding the impact of multiculturalism upon higher education. Efforts to address multiculturalism surface in many facets of higher education including student services, curriculum, and program development. Yet there remains a notable absence of discussion pertaining to the specific role of ethics in addressing the challenges of multiculturalism. University and college presidents possess the responsibility of setting the ethical tone for their institutions and impacting the institutional culture and environment. The Delphi study reported was completed in 1992 and derives, from a stratified random sample of SACS college and university presidents, data forecasting the most salient ethical issues pertaining to multiculturalism in higher education. The data generated from this study is the first of its kind.

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Our growing minority population represents a societal challenge including the reshaping of our laborforce (Estrada, 1988; National Alliance of Business, 1987). The individuals comprising this workforce will encounter the demands of a competitive, technologically sophisticated global economy. Survival in the future workforce will require a variety of competencies and appropriate educational preparation. Concern arises from the fact that despite multicultural efforts in academe the total minority population, particularly African-Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians, continues to move backward in the field of higher education (Arbeiter, 1987; Orfield, 1989). Tinto (1975, 1988) asserts that linkage exists between minority student persistence and integration in both the social and academic system forming the institution. Successful integration is more likely to occur when students can relate their cultural frameworks to that of the institution. Predominantly white campus environments still display disturbing rates of minority student attrition and continued incidents of racial intolerance (Clay, 1989; Farrell, 1988; Lawrence; 1990; Orfield, 1989; D. G. Smith, 1990). The lack of affirming institutional climates is cited as a major factor for minority student attrition (Allen, 1988; Bennett & Okinanka, 1989). If we combine this with other possible factors including insufficient academic preparation, socioeconomic differences, financial problems, and removal from family and community support networks the result can be an overwhelming experience of alienation for the minority student (Rosser, 1990). Minority students often express feelings of alienation prompted by nonsupportive or hostile campus climates (Allen, 1988; Bennett & Okinanka, 1989; G.D. Smith, 1990). According to Anderson (1988), "It does not take an incoming student of color long to realize that the university or college does not actually value cultural diversity in a practical sense" (p. 3). He further argues that those retention programs focusing on the creation of supportive and sensitive environments have demonstrated success. The

institutional environment emerges as a product of the institutional culture (Richardson & Skinner, 1991). Colleges and universities function in organizational contexts defined by their specific values. These values generate the institutional cultures and the ethical framework impacting the choices administrators make (Chesler & Crow, 1990) and traditionally, are visibly modeled by the chief executive officer. According to Rosser (1990), the campus climate and related policies concerning multiculturalism rely on support from the top level of leadership. Chief executive officers possess the ability to significantly influence the culture and bear both the authority and duty to provide ethical leadership (Laney, 1990; Rosser, 1990; Trachtenberg, 1989).

The concurrent increase in incidents of campus racism and high attrition among minority students, despite enhanced efforts to develop multiculturalism and retain minority populations, illustrates a disturbing polarity in higher education. This conflict raises questions regarding the efficacy of institutional programs advancing campus multiculturalism and, more importantly, the administrative decision-making process underpinning these efforts (Barr & Strong, 1988; Rosser, 1990). Barr and Strong (1988) contend that higher education germinates symptom-oriented multicultural programs ignoring endemic racism and functioning as "band-aids." Critics of academe's approach to multiculturalism frequently question the ethical integrity underpinning theses initiatives (Barr & Strong, 1988; Rosser, 1990). Rosser (1990) identifies ethical commitment as the necessary foundation for appropriate administrative conduct. Extensive support exists for the position that higher education must uphold a high degree of ethical integrity and that chief executive officer plays a crucial role in preserving that integrity (Chambers, 1981; Perlman, 1990 ; Trachtenberg, 1989). The committee on Governance of the American Association of State colleges and Universities set forth a policy statement of "Ethical Practices for College Presidents"

(Trachtenberg, 1989). These ethical standards received approval from the association membership at the 28th annual meeting in November 1988. The policy statement implicitly acknowledges the special public trust and attendant responsibilities held by chief executive officers in academe. Among the ethical mandates listed were the following pertaining to the issue of multiculturalism:

> Ensure that institutional policies and practices uphold the dignity of each member of the campus community and do not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age , national origin, physical abilities, or personal beliefs and preferences.
>
> Encourage on campus a recognition that we live in a world community, and inspire within students and faculty an appreciation of cultural pluralism and intellectual diversity. (p. 7)

The results of a study focusing on the views of chief executive officers in higher education (conducted in 1989 by the American Council on Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) reflected the participants strong interest in multicultural issues and related ethical concerns. Clearly the culling of expert opinion, generated from chief executive officers in higher education, addressing the ethical implication of multiculturalism provides a viable approach toward the resolution of related problems in the present and future. Multicultural programs and policies continue to grow, but generally without any clear priorities supported by top administrators to and direct their evolution. There has been a general failure to obtain direct input from chief executive officers. This neglect of ethical concerns portends a diminished ability to justly and effectively respond to the needs of minority students and other diverse populations. The results of the Delhi study reported offer the only data of this type. The findings articulate and rank the future multicultural issues in academe identified as priorities by chief executive officers..

METHOD

The methodology consisted of a Delhi study utilizing three rounds of questionnaires. Participants

received and returned the questionnaires through the mail. The entire data gathering process took place over a period of four months. The Delhi study represents a methodology for the sharing and organizing of forecasts provided by experts (Chacko, 1975; Weaver, 1971). The Delhi technique derives its name from the Greek Oracle of Delhi (Chacko, 1975). The Rand Corporation originated the Delhi concept through their defense research, "Project Delhi," conducted in the 1950's (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). A later study completed by Gordon and Helmer provided the paradigm for many of the Delhi techniques still in use. Linstone and Turoff (1975) emphasize the importance of Delphi for structuring a shared communication process allowing a group of experts, as a whole, to deal with a difficult problem. The process can facilitate a cross-fertilization of ideas regarding problems lacking a specific right or wrong solution (Morrison, Renfro, & Boucher, 1984) and proves beneficial when applied to issues in higher education (Long, 1990). Forecasting activities, such as Delphi, offer the basis for the formation of creative responses to future trends and assist in the definition of viable goals, objectives, and priorities (Long, 1990; McKelvie, 1986). More importantly for this project, the process removes the possibility of the "bandwagon effect" (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). Delhi eliminates the opportunity for one or several individuals to influence the opinions of others through dominance, or persuasive personal power. Considering the many controversies surrounding multiculturalism, particularly issues of "political correctness," Delhi presented the best methodology for determining expert opinion, chief executive officers of colleges and universities, and seeing to what extent consensus regarding priorities among those experts could be reached. In addition, the process elicited minority view responses outside the consensus which were not modified for conformity and bear consideration.

The target population represented by the sample includes all public and private institutions of

higher education currently accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). SACS includes 779 colleges and universities located in the following states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The study utilized a stratified sample. The randomly drawn subsets emerged from SACS institutions separated into the 10 categories defined by the Carnegie Foundation (1987) and included chief executive officers from all types of institutions. The need for basic knowledge concerning the ethical priorities of top-level administrators representing the broad range of colleges and universities serves as the rationale for the selection of this sample. As a pervasive societal concern, multiculturalism to some degree affects all institutions of higher learning, not just a particular category of institution (D.G. Smith, 1990). Without exception, the subjects were chief executive officers from various types of institutions including community colleges. Three rounds of questionnaires, a number typical of Delhi methodology, were completed by the subjects.

Round I

Letters with detailed instructions (and accompanying blank reporting forms) were sent to the CEOs. The subjects were asked to identify at least five but no more than eight, ethical issues pertaining to multiculturalism in higher education. Note that this was not a survey with items to be selected. The subjects were clearly instructed to articulate their own issues in statement form. The issues identified were aggregated, based upon similarity, and comprised the content of the Round II questionnaires.

Round II

Upon receipt of the second questionnaire, subjects were asked to prioritize the 31 issues identified in Round I by assigning each a ranking from 1 to 20 (1 signified the most important issue with

appropriate designations following up to 20). All statements ranked after 20 were signified by 21. Upon receipt of the completed Round II questionnaires, medians and the interquartile range (the range in which the middle 50% of responses lie) were computed for each of the ranked issues. This form of analysis is utilized to determine how the ranking (represented by the median) for each prioritized issue relates to the range of consensus as defined by the interquartile range .

Round III

Round III consisted of a questionnaire which reported the findings of Round II back to the subjects. Four columns of information accompanied each statement and related the following information: (a) indications of the median or middle ranking the group assigned each statement, (b) the rank that particular subject gave in the previous round (confidentiality was securely maintained for each respondent), (c) the acceptable range (interquartile range) indicating group consensus for each item, and (d) blanks for reporting the final ratings. The CEOs considered the three columns of information and entered new rankings in view of this information. Again, the subjects were asked to rank the 20 items in terms of importance from to 1 to 20. Instructions advised that the respondents could repeat their original rankings or change them to conform more closely with the group. Subjects were also requested to explain their deviations from the rank of group consensus to provide further insight regarding their choices.

Upon receipt of the completed questionnaires from Round III, new medians and interquartile ranges were computed. The new rankings were charted for each item and checked with regard to the range of group consensus. A total of 22 completed questionnaires were returned for Round III. This response proved sufficient; Delhi studies with as few as 20 subjects have produced successful predictions (Fazio, 1988).

RESULTS

Table 1 reports the data for the top ten issues identified and prioritized by the chief executive officers. Many of the CEOs assumed new rankings between Round II and Round III. For example, items "R" and "O" moved down from rankings in the top five priorities and items "A" and "B" moved up to positions in the top level of priorities. The chief executive officers identified and ranked the following twenty ethical issues as the most important pertaining to multiculturalism in higher education for the future decade. TABLE 1. reports the final results of the Delphi identifying the top ten issues.

TABLE 1.

Round III Priority Rankings, Medians, and Round II and Round III Consensus Ranges

Priority Statement	Rank	Round III Median	Consensus Range from Round II	Consensus Range from Round III
M	1	6	3-18	3-12
A	2	7	4-21	4-17
CC	3	8	5-21	6-15
U	4	8	4-14	3-12
B	5	8	7-17	6-16
D	6	9	3-16	3-15
R	7	9	5-19	7-12
K	8	10	6-18	4-14
O	9	10	5-18	4-13
J	10	10	7-19	8-17

M. The degree to which minorities can be fairly expected to assume responsibility for overcoming real and perceived obstacles in higher education through their own efforts.

A. Giving preference or setting quotas for minorities in limited programs or admissions to achieve ethnic or racial diversity.

CC. The creation of greater division within the student body through emphasis on cultural differences rather than common experiences and values.

U. The question of "reverse discrimination" or preference based upon race in efforts to implement affirmative action.

B. First Amendment issues of free speech including all forms of artistic expression versus the maintenance of a campus climate supportive of minorities.

D. Considering race or ethnicity in hiring or promotion of faculty members, membership on faculty boards, committees, etc. to achieve diversity.

R. Overgeneralizations and assumptions that all members of a particular ethnic or racial group share the same views and values.

K. Stigma attached to special programs fostering a perception or sense of academic inadequacy or inability to meet intellectual challenges.

O. Possible conflict between preparing minorities to enter the American societal mainstream versus affirmation of minority cultures of origin.

J. Impact of incorporating multiculturalism in core curriculum upon "Mainstream Western" content and national unity.

CONCLUSIONS

The preceding results reflect an overall lack of conformity among CEOs with regard to the topic. Written comments from various presidents also showed attitudes toward multiculturalism ranging from enthusiastic support to hostility. The anonymity guaranteed by the research design allowed participants to express "politically incorrect" opinions which suggests a significant difference between publicly expressed and real institutional values.

This dissonance between action and word may be a significant factor in the success or failure of campus multicultural efforts and merits further investigation. Additional research should be conducted to follow-up on the work begun with this Delphi project. For example, the issues prioritized in the Delphi furnish the basis for a survey instrument which could be utilized for a national study. The utilization of a single questionnaire would encourage a greater rate of participation and make expansion of the sample feasible. This would provide a means to judge the validity of the results and give greater clarification of multicultural priorities in academe. In addition, the data derived from such a study could compare the priorities held by executive officers in various regions of the country to determine if there may be any significant differences. The question of regional context as a factor impacting this problem merits investigation.

Continued inquiries focusing on ethical issues pertaining to multiculturalism in higher education should explore methods positively addressing ethical concerns. The assessment of ethical priorities should be linked to the development of institutional policies, procedures, and programs. Finally, a Delphi study or modified survey technique may later ascertain the reliability of this forecast. Also, it might be repeated with a sample derived exclusively from one institutional category such as chief executive officers in community colleges.

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